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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0448
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0197
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2545
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002313

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, IO, DRL, AF/W, AF/RSA, INR/AA

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SUBJECT: STRATEGIES TO NEGATE "DEFAMATION OF RELIGION"
RESOLUTION (S/ES: 200922459)

REF: A. STATE 128320

[1](#)B. ABUJA 02216

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission James P. McNulty
for reasons in sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Mission Nigeria provides the following information in support of the Department's strategy to engage the Nigerian Government (GON) to reverse its support of the United Nations (UN) "defamation of religions" proposal and back the U.S. alternative.

INFLUENTIAL POWER BLOCKS

[1](#)2. (C) GON officials view themselves as representing an independent and influential country in Africa. They often demonstrate such independence, however, by voting against first world powers, including the United States and the European Union (EU). Therefore, any appeal to senior officials will convey the idea that they could truly demonstrate leadership and influence by working with African colleagues to gain support of an alternative to the "Defamation of Religions" resolution.

[1](#)3. (C) Foreign Ministry officials often assert that their country's votes must reflect the "African consensus." Therefore, to the extent that the U.S. can sway a number of other key African nations away from support of the "Defamation of Religions Resolution," we may be able to dilute or break such consensus.

[1](#)4. (S) The position of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) often influences the votes of several key African nations, including Nigeria, even though GON officials usually do not acknowledge such influence. As a nation with a significant Muslim population and the largest one in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria often feels compelled to vote with the OIC.

KEY GON OFFICIALS

[1](#)5. (S) Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and MFA International Organizations Director Ambassador M. K. Ibrahim both wield influence on UN votes. Therefore, any outreach efforts should include them. Nonetheless, they are likely to point to more senior

officials, such as Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe, as calling the shots on important UN votes. Maduekwe, in turn, will occasionally say that the office of the Presidency makes the final call, as he alleged after Nigeria's vote on the Goldstone Report. Given President Yar'Adua's continued hospitalization in Saudi Arabia, the ultimate decision-maker on this issue remains unclear. While Vice President Goodluck Jonathan is officially second in command to Yar'Adua, he will remain reluctant during his boss's absence to make decisions perceived as differing from the views of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) and the National Security Advisor (NSA), who wield considerable power at the Presidential Villa. On this issue, however, the NSA is likely to support whatever position OIC members assume.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

¶6. (C) Several human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) follow human rights issues closely in Nigeria, but they generally do not exert much influence on GON decision-making. The one exception, on religious issues, may be the one exception, on religious issues, may involve the Co-Chairpersons of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) -- Christian Association President Archbishop John Onaiyekan and Jama'atul Nasril Islam President Sultan of Sokoto Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III.

¶7. (C) Nigerian leaders remain quite sensitive to public criticism from foreign governments, particularly the United States and EU Member States. For example, when the U.S.

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Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) placed Nigeria on its list of "countries of critical concern," the government strongly encouraged USCIRF Commissioners to return to Nigeria to discuss their concerns with senior officials. Any high-level approach to the GON may wish to indicate that Nigeria's vote on the UN "Defamation of Religions Resolution" could influence whether Nigeria remains on the USCIRF list of countries of critical concern.

MISSION'S RECOMMENDATION

¶8. (S) Given the likelihood that the decision on Nigeria's vote will occur at the level of the Foreign Minister or higher, Mission recommends an appeal directly to Foreign Minister Maduekwe to attempt to dissuade Nigeria from voting for the Defamation of Religions resolution. If Maduekwe demurs and insists that the decision remains "above his level," then the appeal should occur through a senior official in the office of the Presidency, such as the Secretary to the Government of the Federation. A parallel approach through the NIREC Co-Chairpersons may be advisable as well.

SANDERS